James – Gospel Motivated Love
Counting Trials as Joy
Passage: James 1:2-4

> *James 1:2 ¶ Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,*
> *James 1:3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*
> *James 1:4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

QUESTION: What is the first thought that comes to mind when you read these verses?

Let's break this verse down into sections so we can fully understand James's meaning.

"Trials of various kinds"
All trials, no matter the nature, should be applied. James knew they were suffering persecution (why they left Jerusalem), but he wanted them to understand that the lack of money and sickness (also known struggles in the church) should be seen as part of the application to his instructions.

"when"
Not if, but when. This is probably the "American dream" creeping into our theology. Subconsciously we believe that God's design for our lives is to live happy, safe, successful lives while we await his return. After we leave earth, we will have NEW lives that are happy, safe, and successful. The difference? We just moved locations, upgraded neighborhoods to 123 streets of Gold, New Earth.

WHEN suffering hits, we ask, "Why me, God?" We are so quick to forget we live in a world destined for destruction. The ship is sinking, and we keep asking for another cocktail to enjoy the sun. When the boat tips and our drink spills, we ask God why he would let that happen.

> *1Pet. 4:12-17 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.*
> *1Th. 3:3 that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.*
> *Rom. 8:22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*
> *Rom. 8:23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

QUESTION: Why is it hard for us to see trials (any type of struggle) as something God would use to grow us as Christians?

"joy"

Yes, this does seem counterintuitive. It's like the kid who smiles when he is sent to his room grounded for a month. Who does that?

James is not telling them how they should FEEL, but how they should THINK.

Joy in the bible is not an emotion of happiness. We know that joy can be held in sorrow because joy is not based upon circumstance or feelings. Joy, biblically, is grounded upon the gospel of Jesus Christ. Nehemiah 8:10 says, "The joy of the Lord is my strength." Joy comes from who God is and the promises attached to his power.

Joy is always associated with realities that are outside of this world and its capacities. Don't think of joy as one must be *"happy"* in a trial. That is weird. Even Jesus showed sorrow and was emotionally distraught when facing the cross. Why would James think we could do any different than Jesus?

> *Heb. 12:2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

What did Jesus connect joy to on the cross? Not the trial, not the suffering, but the outcome. He endured the cross because he knew what he was earning for us, our forgiveness and righteousness. Joy is our hope, not our happiness.

QUESTION: Using the examples above, how else would you describe joy?

"Count"

"Count" is to be seen as an accounting term. As if there are two columns of life. What we would consider bad or good, debit or credit, sad and joy. James is saying, take every trial we may ever face and move them from the debit, bad, sad side of the line, and I see them as adding something to your life, something that is positive. What is it added? ***Perspective.***

> Phil. 3:8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

James continues in the next verse connecting our trials to our faith

> *James 1:3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*

Trials prove that your faith is not in vain. James is saying this:

SEE! It is a good thing you put your faith outside of this circumstance. God is faithful. This trial proves anything outside of Jesus should not have our faith.

Faith is not something we generate, but it is a gift that is given to us by the Father.

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
Eph. 2:9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

God then uses the trials of life to prove to us time and time again that our faith that has been given to us can and should be trusted. Our faith is strengthened when life fails us, but God's promises in Christ never fail us. Trials are almost always some kind of failure in this life. Health, wealth, government, relationship, personal struggles are all connected to this world. Faith points us outside of this world to Christ. Trials remind us that Jesus never fails us. We can have joy and full satisfaction while we wait for our new bodies and our new home with God.

QUESTION: What trial could you use as an example of where God showed you how your faith was in something other than Christ?

QUESTION: How can we encourage each other during a trial and not simply say, "You should have joy!"?

Praise, Prayer, and Confession:

- What can you offer to the Father in praise?
- What is a sin you need to confess?
- What is a burden we can carry?
- What can we take to our Father in prayer?